

The Bank of Columbia
Later Georgetown Town Hall
and then Fire Company #5
3210 M Street, N.W.
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-119

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
Washington Planning and Service Center
National Park Service
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

THE BANK OF COLUMBIA
Later Georgetown Town Hall
and then Fire Company #5

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Location: 3210 M Street, N.W., Washington, D. C.

Present Owner: District of Columbia Government

Present Occupant: Department of Sanitary Engineering, Sanitation Division.

Present Use: Garage.

Statement of Significance: Built originally as a bank, this building is representative of an early commercial type in Georgetown; subsequently utilized for various purposes, each with strong historical associations.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners; This building is situated on original lot 47 (Old George Town) which was purchased by George Gordon on March 24, 1752 (Minutes of the Georgetown Commissioners 1751-1789, Georgetown Journal, "Aldermen," MSS. Div., Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). The Bank of Columbia purchased part of Lot 47 (which had been subdivided) on February 29, 1796, purchased from Thomas J. Beatty, earlier date of transaction unknown. Mayor, Recorder, Aldermen and Common Council of Georgetown June 2, 1845 through October 14, 1863. Elenor R. Lang October 14, 1863 to October 20, 1870. Mayor, Recorder, Aldermen and Common Council received deed March 18, 1871. Government of District of Columbia May 31, 1871 to present (Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Vol. 24, pp. 104-5).
2. Date of erection: Built in 1796 (Liber B. Folio 415, Recorder of Deeds, District of Columbia).
3. Architect: Unknown.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: None known.

5. Notes on alterations and additions: "It was deemed best to reconstruct the Town Hall for the accommodation of the engine company, and accordingly remodeled for \$7,206.11 out of the proceeds of those sales and an appropriation of \$3,000 pursuant to Acts of Congress of March 3, 1883, and July 5, 1884, and so remains."
(Records of the Columbia Historical Society, vol. 24, p. 105).

6. Important old views: None available.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

The builder, the Bank of Columbia, occupied 3210 M Street, N.W. from 1796-1806 (Records of the Columbia Historical Society, vol. 24, p. 104). George Washington owned a large number of stocks in this institution and was a director of the bank (The Wright collection at the George Washington University, stock certificate; George Washington's will). After the bank moved in 1806, the structure lay vacant until 1807, when the Bureau of Indian Trade moved into the building. The agency was prominent during this period as it was in charge of the profitable Indian fur trade. The Bureau occupied the premises until 1822 (Letter-books of the Bureau of Indian Trade letter to Mr. Whann of the bank).

On July 19, 1823 the Georgetown government approved a resolution that the structure be rented for \$150 a year as a "safe and convenient house for the accommodation of this Corporation, and the preservation of the records and papers belonging to the town." On March 22, 1845 an ordinance was enacted approving the purchase of the building for \$2,400, provided the purchase would date from April 1, 1843. On June 2, 1845, the property was transferred to the Mayor, Recorder, Aldermen and Common Council of Georgetown (Records of the Columbia Historical Society, vol. 24, p. 104).

The Town House was sold to Elenor R. Lang on September 30, 1863 for \$7,500. Mrs. Lang failed to meet her payments, however, and the Mayor, Recorder, Aldermen and Common Council repurchased the property as highest bidders at a sale on October 20, 1870, for \$4,900. The deed was dated March 18, 1871, but as an Act of Congress of February 21, 1871 revoked Georgetown's charter as of March 31, 1871, the property ceased to be used as a Town Hall from that date (Records of the Columbia Historical Society, vol. 24, p. 105). The property then reverted to the District of Columbia Government.

Pursuant to Acts of Congress on March 3, 1883, the building was remodeled into an engine house for fire company no. 5 at a cost of \$7,206.11 (Records of the Columbia Historical Society, vol. 24, p. 105). The structure was occupied for this use on November 17, 1883 and remained so until consolidation with another fire company led to its abandonment by the fire department on June 4, 1940 (District Fire Department). Since this time, the building has been in use as a garage for the District Sanitation Department except for a brief period when conveyed by Congress to the Association of Oldest Inhabitants.

Although turned over to the association in August 1959 at one half its market value, the structure was found to be physically deficient to the degree that restoration would cost approximately \$100,000 (The Washington Post, April 29, 1960; January 8, 1961). For lack of such funds, the association returned the building to the District of Columbia Government.

Prepared by Dr. James Philip Noffsinger
Architect
National Park Service
July 14, 1966

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A proud old structure with many important historical associations, the Bank of Columbia, is an excellent example of early Georgetown commercial architecture notwithstanding modifications to its ground floor effected by extensive later alterations. Although it has been almost totally neglected in recent years and lies--for all practical purposes--vacant, the building retains an aura of dignified austerity reflective of the young Republic in which it was built.
2. Condition of fabric; Deteriorating, its interior gutted, cost of restoring the structure in 1961 was placed at \$100,000 (Washington Post, January 8, 1961).

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 39'-8" (four unequally spaced front bays) x approximately 80'; three stories in height.

2. Foundations: Brick to grade.
3. Wall construction: The original Flemish bond, still extant on upper levels of (north) facade, was red-orange in color, is now whitewashed. Altered lower area of facade is of common bond with headers every eight courses; on south elevation headers occur in the common bond at intervals of four courses. Two belt courses, four courses high of slightly projecting brick, extend across facade.
4. Chimneys: None evident.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Original doorway(s) and door(s) apparently removed during 1883 remodeling. Present segmental-arched openings at grade measure, from east to west, 9'-4" masonry opening; 9'-5" masonry opening; 4'-10" masonry opening. Large vehicular apertures in central and east bays have divided two-pane transoms below segmental arches; smaller pedestrian opening has single pane transom. Double vehicular doors are twelve-paneled below single-paneled upper section; single door is similar in design, nine-paneled. All doors are wooden and open inward. Single door on south elevation provides access to back.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Two-over-two-light double hung wooden sash, flat brick arches, stone sills. Second floor windows are taller than third floor windows. West bay has been set apart from three bays to the east expressing function of that bay as stair hall. No evidence of shutters remains.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Roof slopes very slightly from north to south; covering unknown.
 - b. Framing: Unknown.
 - c. Cornice, eaves: Unelaborate metal cornice is defined by console at each end; abstractly classic in design, only a lower string of dentils is immediately recognizable. Four course brick corbeling below cornice includes a regular succession of vertical corbeled brick elements which end just below zigzag belt of vertical stretchers. Less elaborate brick corbeling at eaves in rear is a simplified echo of the facade decoration.

d. Dormers: None.

C. Technical Description of Interiors: In the course of a long physical history and inevitable alterations to suit a multiplicity of uses, the interior has reached the present even more neglected, perhaps, than the exterior. Only a basic framework of the original interior remains: the bay to the west serves vertical (and horizontal) circulation as a stair-hall and corridor; to the east were offices, rooms and--later, on the street floor--a garage. The ground floor is concrete, the upper floors heavy oak boarding; walls and ceilings are plastered. Almost nothing remains of trim, hardware and fixtures.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Facing north on M Street near the southwest corner of the intersection with Wisconsin Avenue, the Bank of Columbia is sited on a location unique to Georgetown: while the structure was once near the center of waterfront activity in an earlier era, it remains--unlike many other early surviving buildings of the maritime era--reasonably close to the present center of commercial activity.
2. Enclosures: None.
3. Outbuildings: Brick dependency of little physical or esthetic distinction extends southward from the east side of the back (south) elevation.
4. Walks: Fronts concrete public sidewalk to the north.
5. Landscaping: None.

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July 14, 1966